2 state experts shoot down 'JFK' theory

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More than one person shot at John F. Kennedy, two Wisconsin history professors and Kennedy researchers said Friday.

But the conspiracy theory presented by the movie "JFK" is ridiculous, said David Wrone, of the University of Wisconsin — Stevens Point, and Thomas C. Reeves, of UW — Parkside. The movie opened Friday.

"I think it does a major disservice to the American people by distorting what happened in Dallas that day," said Wrone, who was rated in 1975 by The Saturday Evening Post as one of the 19 leading researchers on the Kennedy assassination.

The movie, directed by Oliver Stone, says US military and intelligence officials had Kennedy killed because he was going to pull troops out of Vietnam. The movie also cited anger over Kennedy's refusal to provide air support for the Bay of Pigs invasion.

The film's main character is New Orleans Dist. Atty. James Garrison, who unsuccessfully prosecuted businessman Clay Shaw for allegedly conspiring with Lee Harvey Oswald and others to kill Kennedy.

"There's no credible evidence to sustain" Stone's theory, Wrone said. Garrison bribed witnesses and often changed theories on who killed JFK, he said. Reeves, author of "A Question of Character: A Life of John F. Kennedy," agreed that the Stone-Garrison theory is "attention-getting but silly." He called Garrison "a complete kook."

"The idea that Kennedy would bring peace to Vietnam seems totally unconvincing," Reeves said. He noted that Kennedy greatly increased the number of US military advisers in South Vietnam and created the Green Berets to fight Communist insurgents.

Wrone said the film deliberately misleads its audience. For example, a scene that shows photographs of Dallas police rounding up street bums after the assassination purports to show assassins disguised as hobos.

Wrone, however, said four separate investigations, including one by Warren Commission critic Harold Weisberg, found that the men who were rounded up were just winos.

Although he is critical of "JFK," Wrone doesn't think Oswald killed the president.

He says evidence placed Oswald on the second floor of the Texas School Book Depository at the time of the shooting. The shots were allegedly fired from the sixth floor.

The movie has a scene that shows Oswald on the second floor, taking his lunch break, when Kennedy was killed. It also criticizes the Warren Commission's claim that Oswald was able to hide the murder weapon and run to the second floor in the 90 seconds between the shots being fired and Oswald being seen by a co-worker and a police officer.

Reeves said the Warren Commission's "magic bullet" theory — that one bullet caused wounds on both Kennedy and Texas Gov. John Connally — is "pretty hard to swallow." He thinks more than one person shot at Kennedy, but said the evidence doesn't point to any particular suspect.

Similarly, Wrone thinks Kennedy's wounds prove that more than one gunman shot JFK. But the investigation was botched, he said, making it impossible to determine who killed the president.

Wrone said the reality — that the federal government improperly investigated the assassination and then lied about the investigation — is worse than Stone's theory of a military plot.

And, he said, Stone's movie is similar to the Warren Commission report: another distortion of history.

Some Milwaukee area residents who saw "JFK" Friday said the movie's theory seems credible.

"It raises a lot of questions," said Greg Niesen, of Racine.

But Earl Benski, of Milwaukee, said Stone's film "seemed a little far-fetched."

"I think the thing we have to remember is, it's only a movie," Benski said.